DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 080 971 CS 000 709

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TITLE Every Teacher a Teacher of Reading--For Only a Week.
PUB DATE May 73
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Assn. (18th, Denver, May 1-4, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Content Reading; Reading; Reading Development; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Materials; *Reading Programs; Reading Skills; *Secondary Grades
IDENTIFIERS *Operation READS; Sewanhaka (Nassau County New York); SQ3R Study Formula

ABSTRACT

This paper explains the goals of Operation READS (Reading Embracing All Disciplines at Sewanhaka) in helping secondary school subject area teachers develop a favorable attitude toward reading. The program's primary student objective is the acquisition of basic textbook reading skills. Operation READS is an intensive, one week mobilization of all aspects of school life which simultaneously present reading instruction and subject matter teaching. Subject area teachers and reading specialists working together have developed materials which show junior high students that they can read faster and understand and retain more from their books when they apply basic study techniques such as the SQ3R method. The program has been extensively evaluated through performance criteria and teacher questionnaires. All indications are that the program has been successful. (Author/WR)

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EVERY TEACHER A TEACHER OF READING--FOR ONLY A WEEK

Background of the Problem

How often have you heard the old saw, "Every teacher is a teacher of reading?" Baloney. In the secondary schools, nobody believes that except for reading teachers. In a way, subject teachers can't be blamed for wanting to duck out of the responsibility of teaching reading. A chemistry teacher didn't sweat through inorganic and organic chemistry and qualitative and quantitative analysis only to wind up teaching the short "a" sound. Of course science teachers do want their pupils to be able to read well, it's just that they don't want to be the people who have to teach reading, and they don't

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want reading time to impinge on subject content time.

Reading teachers argue that only a content teacher can teach the vocabulary of his own subject, and that those vocabulary words are most meaningful when taught at the appropriate time in the subject classroom to which they apply. Reading teachers quote good, solid research to show that when reading is taught during "regular" subject area time in a content classroom, not only do pupils learn to read better, but they actually achieve better in the subject content as well. Reading teachers cite studies which demonstrate beyond all shadow of doubt that reading skills and subject content can be taught simultaneously, and with advantages to both, by the content teacher. We cite, we quote and we demonstrate, but to little avail. Math teachers are not reading teachers; by temperament, by training and by title they are math teachers and math is what they intend to go on teaching. They want their pupils to have reading, but they want reading teachers to do the teaching.

Overview of One Solution

Operation READS, Sewanhaka Central High School District's program of reading in the content areas, has really made every teacher a teacher of reading. The secret lies in limiting the program to one week. Happily, it has carried over to become a full-time activity for many teachers.

Operation READS is an all-out mobilization of all the resources of our secondary school district of twelve-thousand pupils on a concentration in reading. Every pupil in grades 7 through 9 participates in just about every subject; art, English, home economics, mathematics,

physical education, science and social studies are involved. For approximately five school days, every pupil takes, for example, not math, but how-to-read math; not science, but how-to-read science, etc. He takes it from his regular math, science, et al., teachers who truly become teachers of reading, if only for a week.

How have we convinced content teachers that they do indeed have a responsibility for teaching reading? Five important program components insure success: (A) development of well-written and worthwhile reading materials based on topics in each subject which the teachers would be teaching anyway at that particular period of time involved; (B) delimiting the reading teaching involvement to a single, obviously relevant, easily explained, specific study skill; (C) careful in-service orientation; (D) a publicity campaign including appeals from the chief school administrator on down; (E) feed-back and evaluation.

Selecting the Topic

The district reading supervisor met extensively with the chairmen of each department. Corporately, they suggested a unit of study for each subject which would be compatible with the curriculum for that time in the school year. These teaching units were developed by a content area teacher with the assistance of reading specialists.

Delimiting the Reading Involvement

The only reading/study skills involved was the Survey Q3R Study Method (Robinson, Francis P., Effective Study, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946.) Pupils use the Survey Q3R method on the normal textbook units pertaining to the area covered.

Experienced teachers in each of the subjects, selected for

their writing ability, were paid to author special materials during two weeks of the summer vacation. Two reading specialists provided two initial days of basic reading instruction and stayed with the project to provide the reading expertise. The materials are mimeographed and of the workbook type, applying SQ3R to the actual textbooks the pupils use during the program. Extensive "teachers' manuals" were provided. Some idea of the scope of the project may be gained from the fact that 300,000 pages, many of them consumable, were mimeographed that summer.

In-Service Orientation

It was necessary to convince subject teachers, unenthusiastic over the prospect of teaching reading, that the SQ3R was an effective study method. We had them actually experience its efficacy through personal involvement. The assembled teachers were presented with a chapter in a Canadian history text and given four minutes in which to skim it. Canadian history was chosen since it was a non-technical subject with which most teachers had close to zero prior knowledge. Since four minutes were nowhere near long enough to read the chapter, and since most of the teachers knew no method of skimming or of studying, the group wound up with a mark on the end-of-chapter test of twenty percent, the mark that chance alone would have provided. The reading supervisor then presented the five-step SQ3R study method. At the conclusion of the presentation, the teacher group was led over a four-minute survey of the next chapter of Canadian history. With no further reading, they then took the end-of-chapter test, this time achieving a very convincing eighty percent as a class average. They hadn't just been told SQ3R worked; they had proved it for themselves.

After learning basic SQ3R, teachers met in small groups consisting of other teachers of their own subject with reading specialists and with the subject teachers who had, over the summer, written the materials to be used in the program. The teachers left these meetings "sold," but it was still necessary to convince their pupils.

Publicity Campaign

Operation READS, an acronym spelling out Reading Embracing All Disciplines at Sewanhaka, was launched with all the ballyhoo the district was capable of mustering. A month before the start of the program, each school's walls were papered with posters cryptically proclaiming, "Operation READS is coming." Then, each week for a month, additional posters provided further details until the entire program had been sketched in. Our chief administrator and building principals took to closed-circuit TV and to their public address systems to "plug" Operation READS.

The Program in Action

During the week of the actual program, reading truly became the school effort. Pupils were bombarded with SQ3R in each of their subjects. Administrators and reading specialists walked the corridors to lend support, to secure additional materials if necessary, and to bear a hand whenever it might be needed.

Pupils were totally immersed in reading. Even in art, heretofore regarded as a purely manipulative subject, students were Survey Q3Ring their way through reading materials in history of architecture. In all areas subject teachers had truly become -- teachers of reading.

Feed-back and Evaluation

Many instruments were used to evaluate the project. Scales were devised by means of which classroom teachers could rate their classes as to knowledge of study method and/or ability to apply study skills to content material. All kinds of performance-referenced criteria were provided in a thirty-page evaluation packet. The general results indicated that our pupils, before participating in Operation READS, despite good teaching in the elementary grades, entered secondary school without any real knowledge of a system for studying. By the end of the program, they had been exposed, and exposed in depth, to the SQ3R method, and had had a chance to apply it both under teacher direction and on their own to a wide variety of materials in the different subjects. Many times our pupils were taught SQ3R till they winced at the letters, but they knew how to use it and they were using it, and our evaluations demonstrated this.

The teachers' anonymous questionnaires were collated, analyzed and published, subject-by-subject and school-by-school, a practice we have continued for the five years during which Operation READS has been in effect. One item on the questionnaires give the teachers five alternatives -- five votes to determine the future of the program. The five choices range from, Next year the program should be summarily dropped, to, Next year the program should be extended in length and moved up to include the next higher grade level.

On the basis of questionnaire results, the program has moved from grade seven where it originated to where it now includes grades seven through nine.

The one-week length of the program is its great strength. Even the most subject-oriented teacher can be persuaded to devote one

week to reading. And for one week while all personnel teach reading skills, they and their administrators can maintain an all-out effort.

Operation READS has convinced a lot of subject area teachers that they are responsible for teaching reading in their classrooms, and it has taught them a method for doing it, and provided them with a vehicle for accomplishing it. Operation READS has proved that all teachers are, indeed, teachers of reading -- if only for a week.